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Conceptualizing detention: mobility, containment, bordering, and exclusion

A. Introduction

This paper emerged out of an urgent need for more critical research among geographers on im/migrant detention. The practices, processes, systems, population movements, and enforcement industries driving dramatic growth in detention globally in recent years raise important questions that are fundamentally geographic in nature, empirically and conceptually. Yet, geographers have been slow to conduct this research. As Lauren Martin and Matthew Mitchelson note (2009: 459), “Processes of detention and confinement have been relatively neglected by geographers. This is surprising because these social practices of immobilization are fundamentally reliant on *spatial tactics*, or the use of space to control people, objects, and their movement.” Here, we detail an empirically and conceptually driven rationale for our advocacy of more geographic research on detention and discuss the specific spatial tactics embedded in landscapes of detention. We offer a review of recent literature on detention within and beyond the discipline of geography, and an analysis of this literature that highlights the particular time-space logics that structure the detention of migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers across

national contexts. As such, we understand this literature to be part of the emerging, interdisciplinary field of detention studies.ⁱ We aim for this intervention to synthesize and analyze recent literature in this field, thereby contributing to existing knowledge and simultaneously spurring additional research among geographers on detention.

There is a pressing and clear empirical rationale for more research on migrant detention. During 2009 in the United States alone, approximately 380,000 people spent time in the vast and continuously-expanding migrant detention system. This system consisted of approximately 350 facilities operating at an annual cost of more than \$1.7US billion (Detention Watch Network, 2011). The United Kingdom, too, has expanded its use of migrant detention in the form of “Asylum Screening Units” associated with entry at airports and “Removal Centres,” with over 6.5 billion pounds spent on transfers among facilities during fiscal year 2004-2005 (Hansard, 2005, 2006; cited in Gill, 2009a: 3). Across the European Union, detention facilities have similarly proliferated and now number in the hundreds (Schuster, Forthcoming). There, lengthened stays are due, inadvertently, if in part, to a Return Directive adapted by the European Parliament in 2008 that allowed member states to detain migrants for up to eighteen months (Karlsson, 2010). Australia has similarly intensified detention practices on and offshore (Briskman et al., 2009; Taylor, 2009). The Australian detention regime has especially targeted asylum-seekers who arrive

without a visa, who, according to current law, face mandatory detention upon arrival. As of 20 May 2011, there were 6,729 people detained on Australian mainland or offshore territory (Department of Immigration & Citizenship, 2011).

Both Australia and the European Union have invested heavily offshore and spearheaded bilateral arrangements with source and transit countries to facilitate the repatriation of potential asylum seekers intercepted en route (Betts, 2004). These returns have, in turn, prompted the growth of detention structures along transnational routes traveled by migrants in their journeys through northern Africa, eastern Europe, Indonesia, and Central America to countries where they hope to make asylum claims (see Global Detention Project, 2011). A recent, comprehensive study of detention facilities funded by Australia in Indonesia, for example, estimates some 2000 asylum-seekers that are held in Indonesia after being intercepted en route to Australia to make claims (Taylor, 2009: 4).

Of course, detention systems do not operate in isolation, but rather, are intensified by the growth of related global industries and policies that become enmeshed in distinct geopolitical landscapes. As one example, detention and deportation are interlocking industries: as use of one intensifies, so too does the other. Deportations from several immigrant-receiving countries peaked during the last few years, with the highest rates of deportation (among those countries believed to release reasonably accurate statistical data)

from the United States, South Africa, Greece, the United Kingdom, and Libya (Chamie and Mirkin, 2010). During the fiscal year ending in September 2010, the United States deported over 392,000 people, a record high (Washington Post, 2010).

Other types of immigration enforcement have expanded as well, with the array of authorities that undertake enforcement proliferating. These expansions occur either through the involvement of local police (as in the United States), cooperation of national authorities in transit countries (as in Indonesia and Libya), or involvement of private third parties who run detention facilities and broker arrangements between states, as in the case of the International Organization for Migration operating on behalf of Australia on Nauru and in Indonesia (Ashutosh and Mountz, 2011). Scholars have argued that the privatization of industries associated with detention has increased the numbers of migrants in detention both by creating additional capacity (cells or “bedspace” in industry parlance) at a time when privatization still signals efficiency and cost-saving, and by entrenching an economic motive for each contract filled (Davis, 2003; Flynn and Cannon, 2009; Sudbury, 2005).

Beyond the considerable, even overwhelming, empirical evidence suggesting substantial and rapid growth in detention, lie equally compelling *conceptual* reasons why geographers need to pay more attention to detention practices and processes. In fact, we argue that detention can be conceptualized as a series of processes; and that operating

through these processes are a set of temporal and spatial logics that structure the seemingly paradoxical geographies of detention outlined in this paper. As such, additional research on detention landscapes as carceral geographies will enhance understandings of power relations that shape, and are shaped by, spatial relationships.¹ In particular, we find paradoxical issues of containment and mobility, as well as bordering and exclusion built into national and transnational landscapes of detention. As Martin and Mitchelson show (2009), although the prison itself serves as a paradigmatic institution through which to study spatial arrangements of power, geographers have still proven reluctant to do so.

Finally, we would be remiss not to mention the political urgency of this field of research. As much as empirical growth and conceptual advances matter, this political urgency drives us – and many other scholars and activists – forward in our individual and collective work on detention. We are excited, inspired, and informed by the national and transnational social movements that have evolved to scrutinize and challenge what remains

¹ [Mapping projects become integral to understanding the scope and expansion of such carceral geographies. Our collaborative research project on island detention aims to contribute to mapping projects that locate detention and detainees, such as the Global Detention Project \(<http://www.globaldetentionproject.org/>\) and the Detention Watch Network \(<http://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/dwnmap>\); and mapping projects that media and advocacy groups use to show facility expansion \(e.g. The US Immigration Detention Boom on <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/race-multicultural/lost-in-detention/map-the-u-s-immigration-detention-boom/>\); the proliferation of detention facilities \(e.g. Hills Circle of Friends Australian advocacy efforts on <http://hillscircleoffriends.org/2011/03/map-of-australian-detention-facilities/>\); or to explain policy transfers \(e.g. the International Detention Coalition on <http://idcoalition.org/> or SERCO Watch on \[facebook.com\]\(http://facebook.com\)\). In our project, as in others, mapping thus serves as a way to counter silence, exclusion, and invisibility.](#)

a still growing detention regime.

We pick up where Martin and Mitchelson (2009) left off with their excellent survey piece on geographic literature on detention and imprisonment in *Geography Compass*.

Martin and Mitchelson note three primary analytical contributions made by geographers to these intersecting literatures: the spatial practices of institutions, state responses to globalization, and exclusionary discourses. We draw inspiration from Martin and Mitchelson in their attention to confinement as a spatial technology, but focus on the issue of migrant detention to highlight its specificity as a form and process in work published since the publication of their piece. In that time, for example, Loyd, Burrige, and Mitchelson (2009) authored an article and edited a special issue of *Social Justice* on policing, detention, deportation, and resistance. Like Martin and Mitchelson, they bridge literatures and social movements that challenge imprisonment and detention. The piece serves a precursor to an edited collection with similar objectives (forthcoming). Beyond the United States, scholars have published geographic work that explores practices of migrant detention in other national contexts, including England (Gill, 2009a, 2009b; Hall, 2010), Ireland (Conlon, 2010), Canada (Mountz, 2010), Italy (Andrijasevic, 2010), and Australia (Perera, 2009).

The literature we review and analyze here intersects with broader literatures and

issues associated with imprisonment (Gilmore, 2007; Loyd et al., 2009). It also overlaps and connects with recent writing on detention associated with the ‘war on terror’ carried out by the same nation-states that have intensified national security regimes, which ensnare many migrants as well as others on the move. In particular, the temporality of indefinite detention (Butler, 2004) and the spatiality of so-called exceptional sites have garnered attention (Agamben, 1998; Gregory, 2006; Kaplan, 2005; Reid-Henry, 2007; Sexton and Lee, 2006). These issues and literatures hold key dimensions in common with processes of migrant detention. They involve similar processes of racialized entrapment, economic vulnerability, and the mass media’s homogenized depictions of people who are detained yet remain hidden from view. They similarly render those incarcerated legally vulnerable through criminalization, attaching associations with criminality to rationales for vague senses of fear, unease, and uncertainty.

Still, processes of imprisonment and immigrant detention are also different in important ways, most specifically in the ways in which immigrant detention and immigration enforcement systems also rely on the legally produced, categorical vulnerability of undocumented status. For this reason, we address migrant detention as a particular area of study, identifying distinct spatial and temporal logics – containment and mobility, bordering and exclusion – that fuel its growth and effects.

Many different types of detention policies and systems operate within and across national boundaries. Our analysis draws on a wide range of practices in an equally broad set of geographic contexts. As will be evident in our discussion, the logics that we identify here generally connect these distinct and disparate practices with dispersed sites emerging through the rationales and logics undergirding the growth of detention. More specifically, nation-states and security industries deploy rationales of deterrence and securitization (including temporal logics of prevention and anticipation), and consistently frame these rationales through narratives of migrants as security threats, rhetoric that illustrates the increasing entanglement of securitization and immigration policies (Dauvergne, 2007; Sparke, 2006). These rationales link migration and mobility to fear-driven national security policies, converting mobility into regimes of containment; borders into regimes of exclusion.

The series of processes, logics, and paradoxes that fuel the contemporary practices and expansion of detention are neither ~~necessarily~~ chronological nor exclusive ~~in nature~~. On the contrary, we argue that it is precisely the overlapping and integrated nature of these processes, practices, and logics that accounts for the intensification of detention and the complexity of conducting research on the topic. In the detention of migrants, mobility begets immobility in the form of containment, and border-crossings beget exclusion and

differential forms of citizenship, access, and belonging. ~~We believe that these spatial dialectics in and of themselves.~~ These integrated practices will require more sophisticated and sustained research among geographers. Furthermore, for political geographers, detention facilities offer axiomatic institutions of modern state-building (Martin and Mitchelson, 2009: 462). For cultural geographers, they offer landscapes of power shaped by, and in turn shaping, communities around them. Economic geographers will take note that detention centers often operate in remote locations where they become the primary industry of small towns and surrounding regions.

We organize the remainder of the paper into three subsequent sections. The first reviews the competing logics of containment and mobility operating as forces that result in the large-scale detention of migrants across vastly distant and distinct times and places. The second addresses a related, yet different set of logics informing growth in detention: the paradoxical and geographically mobile processes of bordering and exclusion. In our concluding section, we offer directions for future research suggested by our review and suggest how close attention to interlocking relations of race, gender, and sexuality can better elucidate the spatio-temporal logics of detention.

B. Containment / mobility

Detention functions as part of a rationale to *regulate* mobility through technologies of exclusion, rather than to end mobility altogether. Discourse, laws or policies, and technologies of control—such as detention—together work, McDowell and Wonders (2009) argue, as global disciplinary strategies attempting to differentially shape migrant mobility. While detention functions as one of these technologies, it is governed by its own paradoxical logics that render detention different from other strategies to control mobility. Underlying processes of detention is the juxtaposition of containment and mobility. These elements seem at odds with one another, yet their co-dependency proves central to understanding why and how detention occurs.

State detention of migrants is often rationalized through a fear of the unknown. In this logic, migrants endanger citizens because of their “unclassifiability”; without identities known to the state, they could ‘be anyone’ and ‘do anything’ (Khosravi, 2009: 51). Detention thus becomes an effort to contain and fix the identities of migrants. Ironically, through detention, a process that disconnects migrants from environments where they could be identifiable, the migrant becomes what Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2004) call a “knowable entity” (also see Browning, 2007). Making migrants legally knowable is a key logic behind detention, as demonstrated in cases of wrongful detention. Soldatic and

Fiske (2009) describe detention as a response to “unruly,” “suspicious,” bodies, bodies that apparently resist being identified or classified. They examine cases of wrongful detention in Australia, juxtaposing the racialized “reasonable suspicion” the state requires to detain people with the absolute proof detainees need to secure their release. Only through becoming *knowable* can citizens prove their innocence.

Inside detention facilities, migrants become knowable through minute control of intimate aspects of their lives (Conlon, 2010; McLoughlin and Warin, 2008). Laser controlled door sensors, locked cells, head counts, and daily sign-ins reaffirm state control over migrants’ bodies even if their identities remain in question (Conlon, 2010; Larsen and Piche, 2009; McLoughlin and Warin, 2008; Wilder, 2007). Control over the information that leaves detention facilities is another method of containing uncertain identities. Concealing names or detention locations isolates detainees, rendering them invisible in statistics and impossible to visit (Mountz, 2011).

Yet paradoxically, even as detention works to contain the apparently unknowable migrant, it simultaneously also produces new, highly mobile identities. Attempts to know migrants strip them of individual personhood, and replace individuality with generalized suspicion of deportability and criminality (Gill, 2009a; McLoughlin and Warin, 2008). Migrants become ‘detainable’ subjects. Coutin (2010) describes the ceremonial destruction

of green cards upon entering United States immigration detention, where guards shred detainees' existing legal identities and attempt to reconstitute new personas in their place. Deportation serves as an ultimate confirmation of national identity, and detention affixes the threat of deportation to the bodies of the migrants even if they are released (Coutin, 2010; Khosravi, 2009). Alberti (2010: 143) writes that the status of migrants becomes "a continuous condition of detainment and 'deportability'." Sites of detention therefore produce a highly mobile *illegal* identity that travels with migrants long after they have been detained (Alberti, 2010; Coutin, 2010; Hernández, 2008; Lawston and Escobar, 2009; Sokoloff and Pearce, 2008). Criminalizing migrants invokes a circular rationale that legitimizes detention: migrants *might* be criminals, necessitating detention; migrants *must* be criminals, because they are detained.

Even as detention fixes and contains suspicious migrant identities, it creates new illegalities accompanied by new criminal sources of threat. Hall (2010) examines the fearful and emotive responses of staff in a United Kingdom immigration detention center. While her work focuses on how staff emotions shape detainee experiences, her ethnography also suggests how the paradoxical logic that relies on simultaneously containing migrant identities and producing new, mobile identities works in practice. The United Kingdom authorizes detention if the identities of asylum seekers are questionable, and the need to

make migrants knowable underscores much of the fear and uncertainty experienced by detention center staff. Migrants “could be anyone,” one guard told Hall (2010: 888; 890); continuous anticipation of vague yet pervasive threats make staff “hypervigilant” in their desire to locate and classify migrants. The practical impossibility of ever controlling such nebulous threats produces more fear than such practices can combat. Detention, Hall (2010: 894) writes, “is a productive strategy, which brings forth categories of illegality and undesirability as it seeks to contain them.” Staff members rationalize their harsh behavior through circular reasoning based on migrants’ new illegal identities: migrants’ illegal behavior justifies their confinement even as confinement *produces* their illegality.

Identities are not the only entities that detention at once contains and makes more mobile: bodies, too, are made to conform to the same paradoxical logic. On the one hand, detention works to contain migrant bodies through confinement, remoteness, and persistent surveillance. Detention centers are often located in remote places, where geographic isolation strains or severs migrants’ connections with legal advocates, community support, and family (McLoughlin and Warin, 2008; Mountz, 2011). Sometimes located on faraway islands, other times in forgotten rural areas, detention centers not only keep migrants, as Bauman (quoted in McLoughlin and Warin, 2008: 257) writes, “sealed off in tightly closed containers” through distance, they also do so through architecture. Fences separate

detainees from the world outside, and confining spaces and steady surveillance isolate migrants from each other within detention facilities (McLoughlin and Warin, 2008). Relentless spatial and temporal controls over detained migrants' lives become embedded within their daily routines. Coutin (2010: 204) recalls one detainee who characterized his time in detention as "dead time." Detention contains migrant bodies outside of the detention facility itself. As immigration policing becomes increasingly pervasive and securitized, simply being in public spaces threatens migrants with detention as well (Coutin, 2010; McDowell and Wonders, 2009).

Even as detention contains migrant bodies, it simultaneously makes those same bodies more mobile in controlled ways through dispersal, transfers, and deportation. Rationales for detention often assert that detention is necessary to prevent migrants from absconding, yet in order to prevent migrants from moving (or removing themselves from state oversight), detention continuously moves them around (Heeren, 2010; Hernández, 2008). Frequent transfers among detention facilities are common in the United States, Australia, Italy, and other countries (Global Detention Project, 2010; Kalhan, 2010; Mountz, Forthcoming). From 1999 to 2008 in the United States alone, over 1.4 million detainees were transferred among detention facilities (Global Detention Project, 2010: 14). Dispersing migrants and transferring them among detention facilities separates migrants

from community, family, and legal support while working to conceal their identities (Mountz, Forthcoming). Increasing use of expedited removal methods moves migrants more quickly into what Khosravi (2009: 54) calls the “global circuit of deportation” (Global Detention Project, 2010; McDowell and Wonders, 2009; Wilder, 2007). The movement that underscores logics of detention is suggested by how immigrant detainees in the United States are classified by their relationship to removal, as either “pre-removal” non citizens or migrants in “post removal” proceedings (Global Detention Project, 2010). Detention, in its mobile and fixed moments, immobilizes migrants only to move them elsewhere, and moves migrants only to ensure their future immobility.

In two pieces published 2009, Nicholas Gill juxtaposes the processes of detention as attempts to contain bodies that threaten society through their mobility and efforts to make those same bodies more mobile. Geographers have increasingly focused on stillness and waiting as aspects of broader mobilities scholarship (Cresswell, 2012) especially regarding the process of seeking asylum (Conlon, 2011; Hyndman and Giles 2011; Mountz 2011). In the first (2009a), Gill considers how detention represents a combination of stillness and mobility. In the United Kingdom, detainees are incarcerated; even outside of more formal detention facilities, he notes, migrants must sign in daily. Yet detention also represents involuntary mobility: dawn raids and seizures apprehend migrants, who are transported to,

then transferred between, detention facilities. When migrants are permitted to live in a community, they are granted housing on a “no choice” basis, requiring them to be willing to travel where their accommodation is provided. Although detention in the United Kingdom both contains migrants and makes them mobile, Gill (2009a) concludes that stillness becomes preferable to migrants, who associate staying in place with safety and employ political strategies to do so.

Gill’s second piece (2009b) focuses more closely on the effects of moving migrants among detention centers within the United Kingdom. Frequent transfers represent the assertion and performance of state control over migrant mobility. Movement renders migrants transitory, fleeting, and depersonalized. Transfers undermine the goodwill of staff members who may form ties with individual migrants, limit migrants’ contact with advocates, and serve as a barrier to tracing the whereabouts of migrants. Detention is not simply a matter of containing migrant bodies, but also of choosing when and where they can move. The enmeshing of movement with detention is symbolized by changing the name of detention centers, which are now formally called ‘removal’ centers in England.

The paradoxical logics juxtaposing mobility and confinement also apply to conditions within the detention center. Fences and walls may separate migrants from the outside world, but fear of constant surveillance isolates them from each other, as many

detainees fear that communication with others could endanger their asylum claims (McLoughlin and Warin, 2008). Even while traveling among detention facilities, migrants are often handcuffed, their bodies physically separated from one another (Coffey et al., 2010; McLoughlin and Warin, 2008). Government policies and routine experiences of family separation exacerbate feelings of solitude. Isolation is also an important governing method for discipline or punishment inside detention centers, which not infrequently builds on practices of racialized dehumanization (Hyndman and Mountz, 2008). Solitary confinement is commonly used to discipline migrants, especially those who attempt self-harm or suicide (Athwal and Bourne, 2007; Khosravi, 2009; Larsen and Piche, 2009).

Isolation travels beyond the detention center. The difficulties of communicating with family members and advocates both inside and outside of detention facilities leads to prolonged self-isolation and solitary tendencies among former detainees (Coffey et al., 2010). Migrants become “self-regulating” in their attempts to avoid suspicion (Conlon, 2010; Khosravi, 2009). The indefinite nature of immigrant detention traps migrants in a “permanent and frozen liminal state” even after their release (McLoughlin and Warin, 2008: 260). Detention continues to isolate former detainees, appearing in their dreams as well as curtailing their senses of what could be possible (Coffey et al., 2010; McDowell and Wonders, 2009).

While detention serves to contain and isolate individual detainees, it simultaneously reconstitutes contained individuals as mobile collective threats. Individual migrants and their bodies become mobilized as massive ‘tides,’ ‘waves,’ or ‘floods’ that threaten to overwhelm society (Hyndman and Mountz, 2008). The threat of migrant or refugee mobility plays on raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized stereotypes of who embodies a threat to the national imaginary and draws on increasing connections between ‘security’ frameworks and immigration policies (Hernández, 2008; Rodríguez, 2009). The construction of migrants as *criminal* threats to the body politic echoes the raced, gendered, and classed global prison regime as a whole, which is itself a mobile response to the perceived collective threat posed by these bodies (Kalhan, 2010; Rodríguez, 2009; Sokoloff and Pearce, 2008). Capital, too, responds to the perceived collective threat of the migrant: it circulates through detention regimes in the forms of subcontracts for construction, services, and even the employment of detained migrants (Ashutosh and Mountz, 2011; Burnett and Chebe, 2010; Flynn and Cannon, 2009). The fixing of capital in detention centers creates political and economic incentives for maintaining immigration policies mandating detention for migrants (Hernández, 2008; Venters et al., 2009).

Detention requires both containing the individual and making mobile the collective threat that the individual represents. Khosravi (2009) interviews former detainees and

detention center staff in Sweden, examining how conduct inside the detention center connects to conflicting discourses of ‘caring for’ or ‘saving’ refugees while also categorizing them as national security threats. The Swedish word for detention center is “warehouse,” and workers describe their paradoxical role of providing hospitality—what Khosravi calls “hostile hospitality”—for people who are subjected to “violent forms of bodily removal” (Khosravi, 2009: 41; 44). Detention center staff members are encouraged to convince migrants that they can “rescue” themselves by agreeing to be deported, ushering migrants into deportation networks where they are sometimes subjected to multiple expulsions, even from their country of origin (Khosravi, 2009: 46; 54). The criminalized migrant as national security threat plays into global justifications for development of the detention industry. Funding for deportation and detention in Sweden increased over 70 percent between 2000 and 2007. These budgetary shifts demonstrate the central role of deportation and detention in the Swedish asylum process, as well as Sweden’s position within changing European Union policy frameworks that increasingly employ policies of control and security rather than those offering reception or access to asylum (Khosravi, 2009: 41; also see Makaremi, 2009 and van Houtum, 2010).

Containment of individual bodies remains intricately intertwined with mobile forces of capital and legitimating discourses. The juxtaposition of mobility and containment is a

logic that underscores many of the contradictory behaviors detention exhibits: fixing identities while creating new ones, confining bodies while moving them around, or isolating individuals while mobilizing their collective, global threat. Yet while detention may be constructed out of conflicting logics, these manifest distinctly at different sites. The geography of detention shapes how its paradoxical underpinnings take form and reveals the need for more research on detention processes and practices.

C. Bordering / exclusion

Detention centers are a powerful, physical manifestation of exclusionary state practices, which work not only to contain mobility, but also to reconfigure and relocate national borders. Practices of detention reify borders between citizens and non-citizens, producing identities of legality and illegality, alien and non-alien. Within spaces of detention there exist microspaces and processes that seek to further demarcate and differentiate detainees while punishing and controlling migrant bodies. Practices of detention linked to deportation also move national borders both outward, beyond sovereign territory, and inward, away from official checkpoints. The mobility of borders becomes affixed to migrants' bodies. We suggest that the work done by geopolitical borders in

“separating the wanted from the unwanted” (van Houtum, 2010: 958) through exclusion, or “draw[ing] lines between the favored and the disfavored” (Herbert, 2008: 661), takes place within structures and processes of detention.

Van Houtum (2010) demonstrates how the European Union’s global border regime more broadly, and detention practices more specifically, rely upon logics of exclusion that determine who can travel freely and who must be deterred or detained. White (acceptable) and black (unacceptable) Schengen lists classify countries whose citizens require visas to travel in the European Union, functioning to exclude the global poor while maintaining a particular understanding of the idealized citizen of the European Union. The borders of the European Union are conceptualized as both tightening and filtering, employing biometric and passport technologies to select individuals to be detained or deported (van Houtum, 2010, also see Andrijasevic, 2009: 161, Broeders, 2009). These processes of ordering bodies construct categories of illegality via exclusion, just as remote locations and legal ambiguities are themselves borders that exclude migrants from the wider society (Bashford and Strange, 2002; Conlon, 2010). Expansion of border enforcement through detention practices leads to exclusion of migrants even after their release (Coutin 2010).

Spaces of detention, like borders, become important and productive locations for affixing categories of exclusion to migrants’ bodies. Coutin’s (2010: 205) research on

undocumented Salvadorans in the United States highlights how detention *produces* ideas of migrants as aliens, even for individuals who were permanent residents and considered themselves quasi citizens. Within the microspaces of detention facilities, practices of solitary confinement effectively create a prison within a prison (Shaylor, 1998). These practices of exclusion reify boundaries between good and bad detainees – those who acquiesce and those who protest. Human Rights Watch (2006) documents the use of solitary confinement and torture of migrants detained in Libya who are in transit to safe third countries in the European Union. There, migrants who “make trouble” or start fights are punished with physical abuse and solitary confinement. In the United States and Australia, extended periods of solitary confinement are used to compel individuals to agree to deportation (Bashford and Strange, 2002; Macklin, 2003).

Detention is often implemented differentially according to race and gender (Rodríguez, 2008; Sokoloff and Pearce, 2008). Within detention facilities, bodies may be arranged in particular ways to separate migrants from each other (Alberti, 2010; Flynn and Cannon, 2009; Ogren, 2007). Alberti (2010) discusses how protests from inside and outside the Lesvos detention center in Greece prompted authorities to offer partial ‘liberation’ – movement to a camp with better conditions – for women with small children. Gender was used to mark the boundaries between bodies that deserved “special treatment,”

demonstrating how discourses of sexuality and gender that construct women as powerless and vulnerable become reified within sites of detention. At the same time, a lack of concern for the human rights of men and women without children “helps the state to legitimize its violent practices of detention and removal” (Alberti, 2010: 141) by diverting inquiry and advocacy away from questioning the overarching logic of raids, detention, and deportation. Boundaries separating detainees from non-detainees and separating detainees amongst themselves proliferate in detention facilities. Ordering bodies within detention anchors and reproduces geopolitical, raced, classed, and gendered borders, while simultaneously distinguishing between “others” and citizens.

While detention is inextricably linked with processes of exclusion, expulsion, and border policing, it also demonstrates how borders are located and mobilized *within* national territories. Coutin (2010) describes the detention center as territorially ambiguous, simultaneously inside and outside national territories. Efforts to detain migrants within these ambiguous spaces, including localized immigration enforcement and worksite raids, stretch the territorial border to cover the entire territory of the nation-state. When migrant presence in everyday spaces becomes vulnerable to detection by immigration authorities, national spaces become spaces of detention in which undocumented migrants limit their

travel, and fear of detention and raids work to confine individuals to increasingly private and exploitative spaces (Coutin, 2010).

Exclusion is not only multi-sited, but a multiscalar process. McNevin (2010) reveals how the border and border enforcement occur not just at official border checkpoints, but are experienced at various local scales. For example, in the European Union, Schengen agreements abolishing border controls between member states seem to have created a *regional* European Union border that appears to shift national border control from individual state locations to the European Union as a whole (Ceriani et al., 2009). However, agreements like Dublin II, which assigns responsibility for processing asylum applications to the first state in which a migrant lands or is detected, effectively work to relocate the border to the interior of all European Union member states (Alberti, 2010; Broeders, 2009). The seemingly regional border becomes not only *subnationally* enforced, but also *individually* affixed. Through the use of digital databases like Eurodac, which fingerprints all asylum applicants in the European Union over age fourteen (Broeders, 2009), migrants carry borders on their bodies and in their fingertips (Amoore, 2006).

Detention practices temporally regulate migrant movement (Andrijasevic, 2010: 149). Overlapping practices of regional, national, subnational, and embodied exclusion create torturous and circular pathways for migrants. For example, many migrants who land

in Greece, where it is difficult if not impossible to obtain asylum, travel to other European Union states. When they are detected, they become detained and are expelled to Greece (Alberti, 2010). Migrants released from detention in Greece with a ‘white paper’ –an order to apply for asylum and leave Greece within 30 days– find themselves marked bodies within in a “pattern of circularity” and illegality upon their expulsion to Greece (Alberti, 2010: 143). The combination of digital markers acquired in detention that travel with migrants through European Union space and the forced mobility of Dublin II agreements locates the European Union’s border—and the exclusionary practices of detention—in multiple scales and spaces (Coutin, 2010).

While European Union border enforcement *appeared* to move border enforcement and exclusion of migrants away from the national scale, processes of detention *truly* externalize borders beyond national territories and offshore. For example, European Union and member state borders have moved beyond national territories and into international waters (Klepp, 2010). Italy has been particularly vigorous in its attempts to move border enforcement and migration control beyond its sovereign soil, often through bilateral agreements. In 2007, Italy officially began practices of “*respingimento*,” or pushing back migrant boats to Libya so as not to allow them to reach sovereign soil (Protocollo Operativo Italia Libia, 2007). Italy continues to detain migrants on its territory, but also

finances the construction of detention centers in Libya for “pushed-back” migrants (European Commission, 2005: 59; see also Andrijasevic, 2006; Klepp, 2010). Karakayali and Rigo (2010: 124) point to the policing of migrants in international waters, noting that “every vessel suspected of transporting “‘illegal’ migrants is considered a virtual border.” Italy’s practices demonstrate the intrinsic relation of detention (offshore and within sovereign territory) to expulsion and border policing processes, which both work to exclude migrants from particular territories and limit their mobility (Andrijasevic, 2009; 2010).

Similarly, Andrijasevic (2010) maintains border ‘deterritorialization’ occurs when these mobile or virtual borders are juxtaposed with geopolitical borderlines imagined as static and deterritorialized borders. For example, such practices are evident in Europe through readmission agreements with third countries, European Union visa and asylum policies, and biometric data tracking systems for migrants and asylees. Relying on Freudenstein’s (2001) “virtual border” and Bigo’s (2003) “indeterminate zones,” Andrijasevic (2010: 153) demonstrates how borders inhabit new localities, such as the bodies of migrants in transit, in detention, and through deportation and detention centers in Libya. She suggests, furthermore, that the European Union’s external border is de-localized from southern Italy into Libyan sovereign territory via joint Italian-Libyan sea patrols, deportations, and Libyan detention centers.

Sites of migrant detention allow nation-states to locate and enforce their borders beyond sovereign soil. Offshore detention practices and excision of national territories for purposes of migration in Australia signal how practices of detention work to exclude migrants through the externalization or retraction of national borders (Bashford and Strange, 2002; Hyndman and Mountz, 2008; Mountz, 2010; Papastergiadis, 2006). Likewise, proposals from European Union member states for building temporary processing centers for asylum seekers outside national territories have been decried by scholars and activists alike who see these pseudo-detention centers as externalizing national borders or processes of asylum (Hyndman and Mountz, 2007; 2008; Karakayali and Rigo, 2010). Andrijasevic (2009: 159) contends, however, that as external processing centers do not yet exist for the European Union, the detention and expulsion of migrants “constitutes a retraction of the right to asylum rather than its externalization” and thus, the entrenchment of European Union borders. We suggest that the strategic location of detention facilities offshore allows both entrenchment and externalization to occur and overlap, working to exclude migrants at multiple locations and scales through competing and contradictory logics. Proposals for the geographical distancing of asylum processing centers operate to externalize state borders by distancing locations of border control, enforcement, and exclusion. It is sometimes possible for those detained en route to be resettled in ‘third

countries' (i.e., neither the country of transit nor destination, but a third country that agrees to resettlement). At the same time, the borders of the European Union and members states are indeed entrenched, as no guaranteed right to asylum exists in many countries outside European Union sovereign territory, like Libya or Egypt.

Detention fuses overlapping scales and spaces of border enforcement, introducing exclusionary practices that become affixed to bodies, locales, and even regions. Detention reconfigures and reifies citizenship and belonging, inclusion and exclusion, in particular ways. In the United States, many Salvadorans with green cards perceived themselves as existing within a continuum of citizenship, not as non-citizens or citizens, but belonging to the United States all the same (Coutin 2010). Similarly, for Andrijasevic (2006), European Union detention centers are not locations where notions of the citizen no longer apply, but rather “mechanism[s] that play a pivotal role in the formation and organization of European citizenship through the principle of differentiated inclusion” (Andrijasevic, 2010: 149). Citizenship becomes a zero-sum game of rights. For example, in Australia, migrants born in detention centers, unlike those born elsewhere in Australian territory, are refused citizenship (Crock, 2010; Papastergiadis, 2006). Such decisions by the Australian government reflect inclusion and exclusion in the form of citizenship. Detention, thus, becomes a space where citizenship is constructed through its denial.

Van Houtum (2010: 959) urges scholars to do more than study borders at the line or the limit, but to study their transformation. We suggest that studying spaces of detention reveals significant bordering processes where borders themselves are reimagined and transformed through and within detention. Detention is best understood as a process that cannot be disconnected from detection, deportation, and exclusion. Detention reimagines territorial sovereignty as reaching beyond national borders while also moving inside, within everyday spaces so that migrants experience confinement outside of formal institutional structures. In many ways, borders cannot be conceptualized as solely inside or outside detention, as detention itself blurs the boundaries between inside and outside the nation-state by reifying boundaries between migrants and citizens. In other words, as Giorgio Agamben (1998) argues, detention produces paradoxical processes of deterritorialization, externalization, and internalization of borders through the deliberate bordering and marking of migrant bodies.

D. Conclusions and directions for future research

We have focused on migrant detention as an area of study partly because it provides a unique lens through which to study distinct and specific spatial and temporal logics –

temporary and indefinite, remoteness and proximity, internalizing and externalizing borders. These logics fuel the growth and lingering effects of detention. The scales across which immigrant detention functions range from the intimate to the geopolitical, cross-cut by local trajectories of military and prison economies and transnational resistance. Its sites are dislocated and its effects lived far from detention walls, as the section on containment and mobility depicts. Nation-states and security industries deploy anticipatory temporal logics as rationales for prevention and deterrence, which take spatial form in the fortification of border walls, deployment of mobile interdiction forces, and detention centers. While deterrence offers assurance of prevention and protection, these promises are deeply uneven, as the section on bordering and exclusion illustrates.

Like Martin and Mitchelson (2009), we feel that it is imperative to situate detention within specific practices of policing and carceral geographies. “Interior enforcement” cannot happen in the United States, Australia, and the European Union without capacities for surveillance and apprehension delegated to local authorities; nor can detention happen in the absence of existing jails. Imprisonment and detention involve similar processes of racialized entrapment, together generate economic vulnerability (and gain), and increasingly share sturdy legal and discursive practices of racialized criminalization. The naturalization of criminalization through racialized discourses is imperative to challenge in

research by tracing the genealogies and practices of criminalization, and in advocacy by questioning organizing strategies that rely on commonsense binaries between the innocent citizen and violent, criminal, or guilty person. Detention is not inevitable. But to imagine a different future, we must question the association between coercive confinement and safety or security. As this paper suggests, the question of *whose* security is at stake looks quite different from the perspective of people seeking safety and opportunity in the face of persecution and dispossession.

Building on these insights into detention as paradoxical sites of immobilization and mobility, of bordering and exclusion, we conclude by pointing to some additional avenues for research. Martin and Mitchelson's (2009) understanding of detention as a process that has much in common with imprisonment lies firmly within a trajectory set some fifteen years ago by Jonathan Simon's (1998) path-breaking article in *Social Text*. Simon situates the reemergence of normative immigrant detention in the United States, following a 27-year hiatus, within the context of a rapidly expanding prison regime. Mass incarceration was already drawing critical attention as a remarkable system of capture and incapacitation of millions of people, best understood within a longer genealogy of anti-Black racism and as a racialized state form that was being reorganized during a prolonged moment of capitalist restructuring. These racialized infrastructures combined with Cold War

geopolitics to naturalize detention of asylum-seekers and migrants. The differential effects of these policies are well known: Cuban refugees received favorable treatment while Haitians were, and continue to be, excluded from asylum, or consideration of the harms they are likely to encounter if repatriated. More recently, indefinite detention at Guantánamo Bay has drawn attention to the material connections between prisons and war. But as Simon's piece suggests, there are longer histories of war-making and colonialism that need to be traced in order to better understand the spatial logics of security underpinning imperialism and capitalism. Sidaway (2010) has done this in his study of the British colonial history of Diego Garcia, while Weston's (2008) study of transportation as a form of colonial punishment opens inquiry into political ecologies of confinement. Both of these pieces underscore the importance of attention to race, and its production through criminalization

Simon's (1998) observations remain imperative avenues for research. Immigrant detention offers a particular view into the global prison regime, not because of its size in comparison to mass incarceration in the United States or the volume of international migration, but because of how it so readily illustrates new forms of state-building and shifting sovereignty, and so patently draws attention to the regulation of labor power. Simon's provocative thesis that detention and migration enforcement signaled a downward

and upward transfer of sovereignty from the nation-state has since been bolstered by Brown (2010), Mountz (2010), Varsanyi (2008), and Coleman (2006).

Simon (1998) posits a second challenging thesis that immigrant detention is tied up not only with geopolitical crises, but with crises of governance in global cities. This thesis has been pursued less explicitly (but see McDowell and Wonders [2009] and Varsanyi [2008] for suggestive work). More often the scale of analysis remains the nation-state. Here, too, conceptualizing the links between detention and the regulation (and discipline) of labor mobility would be welcome. The study of detention could learn a great deal from the study of the political economy of prisons (Bonds, 2006; Gilmore, 2007). Comparative study of the (racial) geopolitics of migrant detention and interdiction could be a way to explore multiply scaled political economic relations and governance structures that shape mobility and immobility.

Finally, following Silvey (2004), we also suggest that feminist analyses of detention can illuminate specific modalities of detention as processes of containment and mobility, bordering and excluding. Escobar (2009), for example, shows how Latina women became detainable as part of the dismantling of the United States welfare state. This process relied on both anti-Black racism and anti-Latina/o politics. Latina and Black women's reproductive capacities discursively became the source of national economic

failing and social fragmentation, narratives that in turn became rationales for enacting revanchist and exclusionary policies rather than redistributive ones. LeBaron and Roberts (2010) propose a feminist political economic reading of mass imprisonment, which highlights how prisons differentially shape social reproduction. Family separation, for example, is not unique to immigrant detention and deportation, but is a condition of imprisonment where gendered and racialized effects are shaped partly by duration of separation, conditions of detention, indignities and violences endured, and ability to communicate ([see Martin, 2011](#)). Another avenue of research suggested by attention to social reproduction concerns the condition of deported people's lives. Questions of how people who have been repatriated – and may have no memory of that country, or who may have sold everything to travel for work – manage to forge new livelihoods is just now receiving attention (Hiemstra, forthcoming; Loyd et al., forthcoming; Peutz, 2010). This work on the “deported diaspora” could be furthered by work on both transnational economies of care (Parreñas, 2005) *and* the political economy of prisons as mentioned.

A second dimension of detention that a feminist analysis can better detail concerns the shifting and multiple relations between public and private. The increased use of private contractors to detain migrants and fortify walls draws attention to shifting formations of sovereignty, a perspective that broadens attention from a narrow focus on profitability to a

broader understanding of privatization as a means of restructuring and *expanding* state capacities (White, 2001). A feminist analysis of privatization arrangements can question the blurry and conflicting public-private divides, such as when private and state subcontracting agents invoke detainee privacy to insulate detention facilities from scrutiny and evade public accountability. A feminist analysis also highlights the importance of attending to the affective terrain of legal remedies. At a time in which so much legal advocacy relies on narrating detainees' private lives in public, establishing sympathetic narratives of family or racial-gender violence can simultaneously reproduce normative sexualities, kinship structures, and racial formations. As suggested by Alberti (2010), dominant conceptualization of gender and protection can become the means through which detention is *expanded*. In this way, race, gender and sexuality are not incidental to detention, but produced and mobilized by it.

We have focused on detention not because it is an exception from imprisonment, but because it elucidates a conceptual and material crossroads between the domestic and foreign, the intimate and geopolitical, that are enmeshed with the displacement and dispossession wrought by colonialism, war-making, and imperialism. While detention globally may encapsulate paradoxes of containment and mobility, bordering and exclusion, a feminist analysis can help delimit the ways in which discourses of security, illegality,

irregularity, and criminality are deployed in different places. Detention centers encompass the paradoxes we identify because they normally, not exceptionally, enact competing modes of sovereignty, acting simultaneously as the authoritarian sovereign that refuses oversight and the modern sovereign that conveys transparency and accountability through the rights of the imprisoned (Simon, 1998). Much of what we know about these tensions comes from advocates doing the work of documentation against obscurity, publicity against silence, and challenge against impunity. Human geographers can contribute to these forms of advocacy by reconceptualizing detention as a paradoxical process where crisis and criminalization squeeze the global migrant population from all sides. Detention policies may promise ‘security’ through containment, borders and exclusion, but viewed as an integral part of global political economic circuits, these promises ring hollow. As recent research in detention studies suggests, the only ‘secure’ outcome of these policies is the unparalleled global expansion of migrant detention.

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ⁱ Martin and Mitchelson (2009: 460) identify “an emerging literature [they] term ‘geographies of detention and confinement.’” While our analysis of literature overlaps with and builds on the work of Martin and Mitchelson, we also see a broader, interdisciplinary field emerging, with a dearth of contributions by geographers.